



**Testimony of the
American Association of University Women (AAUW) of Michigan
Before the
House Health Policy Committee
House Hearing Room 519, House Office Building
June 7, 2012**

Good morning. My name is Jane Watkins and I am the incoming President of AAUW of Michigan. I am representing the organization at this hearing and appreciate the opportunity to give testimony on the package of reproductive and women's health bills that were introduced on May 31, 2012.

By way of background explanation, AAUW is a membership organization founded in 1881. It has approximately 100,000 members and 1000 branches nationwide. This year, AAUW celebrates its 130-year history of breaking through barriers for women and girls. The organization continues its mission through education, research, philanthropy and advocacy. AAUW of Michigan is the state affiliate of the national organization with approximately 3,000 members and 41 branches throughout the state.

AAUW, like our coalition organizations represented here today, support the right of every woman to safe, accessible, affordable, and comprehensive family planning and reproductive health services. This position stems from AAUW's 2011-2013 Public Policy Program, which advocates, "choice in the

determination of one's reproductive life ... increased access to health care and family planning services including expansion of patients' rights."

Family planning fosters self-sufficiency, promotes preventive health care, and educates people on ways to protect themselves and their families from the spread of sexually transmitted infections. AAUW trusts that every woman has the ability to make her own informed choices regarding her reproductive life within the dictates of her own moral and religious beliefs. Further, AAUW believes that these deeply personal decisions should be made without governmental interference. AAUW members have made the protection of reproductive rights a policy principle since 1977.

Personal choices made without governmental interference. Twenty-three years ago I became pregnant. An ultrasound revealed that my pregnancy was ectopic. An ectopic pregnancy occurs when the fertilized egg attaches outside the uterus. This kind of pregnancy is dangerous, and must be treated in the early stages to avoid complications. After discussing the risks with my doctor, and with a great deal of emotion and prayerful meditation, I chose to terminate the pregnancy.

A back alley abortion or early death might have been my options prior to 1973.

Thankfully, it was 1989 – sixteen years after the Supreme Court's 1973 ruling in *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion for all women and found abortion to be a constitutionally protected fundamental right. The ruling not only legalized my right to choose, but allowed my doctors, healthcare providers and insurance company the ability to provide abortion services and coverage.

The lack of comprehensive support for reproductive health has resulted in dire outcomes for American women. Half of all pregnancies in the United States are unintended. Of three million unintended pregnancies annually, four in ten of those end in abortion. The United States continues to have one of the highest rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the industrialized world, and, although teen birth rates have recently declined, the birth rate of girls ages 15 to 19 was 39.1 births per 1,000 in 2009, one of the highest rates in the industrialized world.

Reproductive rights have been under attack for decades—even before *Roe v. Wade*—and advocates continue to face grave challenges and attacks from anti-choice activists who refuse vital advances in women’s health. These attacks have taken many forms and resulted in negative outcomes at all levels of government. AAUW stands with the Obama administration, congressional leadership, and pro-choice advocates nationwide in contending with a wide array of obstacles.

All women, regardless of race, religion, age, or socioeconomic standing have a constitutionally protected right to choose. In order to be more than an abstract right however, this right must include real access to a full range of reproductive health and family planning options. Unfortunately, many of the most vulnerable groups of American women are being denied fundamental control of their reproductive lives due to increasing restrictions successfully advanced by anti-choice lawmakers at both the state and federal levels. And even while taking positive steps for women’s health overall, the health care reform law signed by President Barack Obama in March 2010 contained additional restrictions on women’s reproductive rights.

The proposed Michigan bills that regulate abortion practices are the most sweeping revision of the public health code regarding abortion practices we have ever seen. AAUW agrees with Planned Parenthood that the package is “vague, poorly drafted and will have incredibly serious ramifications for women’s access to health care services.”

AAUW believes that improved pregnancy prevention programs, new technologies, and access to complete reproductive health services enhance women’s reproductive choices, which leads to improvements in women’s health care in the United States and around the world. The Obama administration and pro-choice members of Congress have produced important gains for reproductive health and freedom, but many challenges remain. AAUW’s advocacy of a woman’s right to safe, accessible, and comprehensive reproductive health care will remain an integral part of its efforts to gain equity and justice for all women.

Women’s reproductive choice is a matter of health. It should not be a matter of politics.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this very important subject that impacts women statewide.

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